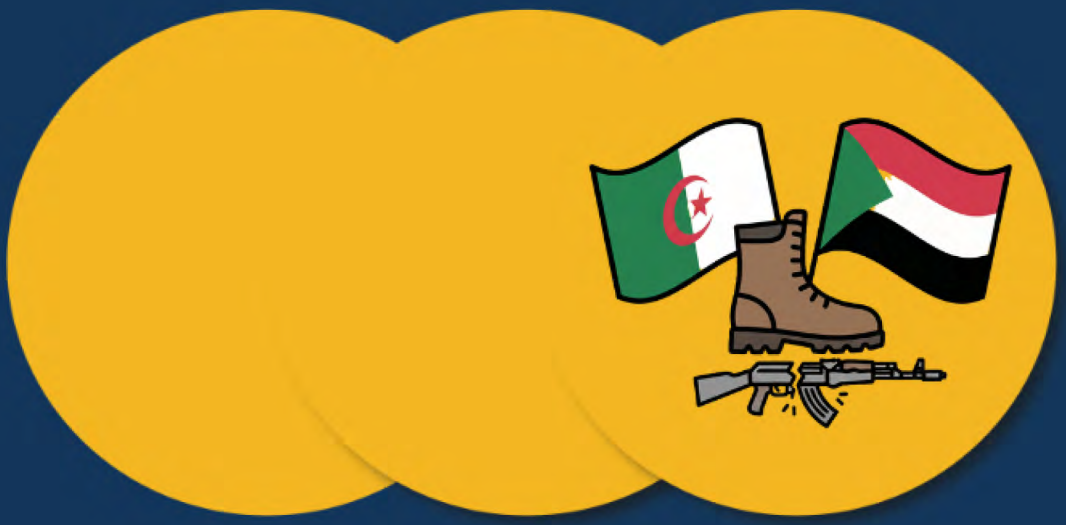
7 • 2 • 2025



Counterterrorism as an Instrument of Normalization in Foreign Policy: Sudan and Algeria in the Global War on Terror

Giorgio Musso

NAD
Nuovi Autoritarismi e Democrazie:
Diritto, Istituzioni, Società

NAD Nuovi Autoritarismi e Democrazie: Diritto, Istituzioni, Società

doi: 10.54103/2612-6672/30256 ISSN 2612-6672 – Anno 2025 – vol. 7 (n. 2)

Saggi

COUNTERTERRORISM AS AN INSTRUMENT OF NORMALIZATION IN FOREIGN POLICY: SUDAN AND ALGERIA IN THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

La lotta al terrorismo come strumento di normalizzazione in politica estera: Sudan e Algeria nella Guerra globale al terrore

*Giorgio Musso**

ORCID: GM 0009-0001-9194-8547

Abstract

[Eng.] The Global War on Terror (GWOT), launched by the United States in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, presented countries all over the world with threats and opportunities, and each one tried to adapt to the situation and exploit it to its own advantage. Apparently, the choice was clear: either stand with Washington or against it. What we argue in this paper, through a comparison between the Algerian and Sudanese case, is that before 9/11 counterterrorism had already become a common ground for cooperation between the U.S. and regimes it deemed "untouchable" in the 1990s. The GWOT accelerated and intensified this trend, but this didn't result – at least for the cases considered – into the forging of new strategic partnerships, due to domestic "red lines", enduring mistrust and path-dependence from traditional regional alliances.

Keywords: Global War on Terror – September 11th – Counterterrorism – Sudan, Algeria.

[It.] La guerra globale al terrorismo (GWOT), lanciata dagli Stati Uniti all'indomani degli attacchi dell'11 settembre 2001, ha posto ogni paese nel mondo di fronte a una serie di minacce e opportunità, inducendo ogni governo ad adattarsi alla situazione e a cercare di sfruttarla a proprio vantaggio. Apparentemente, la scelta era chiara: bisognava schierarsi con o contro Washington. Questo articolo, attraverso un confronto tra il caso algerino e quello sudanese, mostra come già prima dell'11 settembre la lotta al terrorismo fosse diventata un terreno comune tra gli Stati Uniti e regimi che, negli anni '90, erano considerati per diverse ragioni "intoccabili". La GWOT ha accelerato e intensificato questa tendenza, ma ciò non ha portato, almeno nei casi in esame, alla formazione di nuove partnership strategiche. Ciò a causa della presenza di "linee rosse" sul piano della politica interna, di persistenti diffidenze e della dipendenza degli Stati Uniti da alleanze regionali consolidate nel tempo.

Parole chiave: Guerra globale al terrore – 11 settembre – antiterrorismo – Sudan – Algeria.

* Researcher in African History and Institutions at Università Roma Tre (ror: 05vf0dg29). The essay was submitted to double blind peer-review.

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International

© The Author(s)

Published online: 01/12/2025

Milano University Press

Contents: 1. 9/11 and the Problem of Periodisation. 2. A War, but of What Kind? 3. Algeria and Sudan: Two Parallels Converging 4. «We Told You So»: Algeria in the Global War on Terror 5. Sudan: Stuck at the Crossroad of Redemption 6. Conclusions

1. 9/11 AND THE PROBLEM OF PERIODISATION

If Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen are right when they contend that one way to overcome «the monopolar and Eurocentric vision of globalization is the attempt to study […] 'historical moments of global importance'»[1], the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, constitute a prime candidate for such an approach. Despite having taken place at a time when mobile phones were not that smart and YouTube had yet to be invented, the images of the second plane crashing into the south tower of the World Trade Center and the subsequent collapse of the skyscrapers were watched simultaneously by billions of people all over the globe.

The choreographic impact of those events, the huge toll they took in human lives and their global resonance gave the impression of a historical watershed. Over time, this immediate reaction became embedded into a narrative that gave for granted the existence of a temporal cleavage between a "before" and "after" 9/11. This representation was challenged, over the following years, by scholars adopting the so-called Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) approach. They analysed how the construction of a discourse establishing 9/11 as a temporal marker became instrumental in legitimizing the Global War on Terror (GWOT) launched by the administration led by George W. Bush, with its wide range of violent and intrusive measures[2]. Maja Zehfuss (2003) went so far as to provocatively argue the need to "forget" September 11 to withdraw moral legitimacy to the aggressive policies enacted by the United States (U.S.) and their allies.

Such post-structuralist approach addresses the need to avoid taking common sense discourses for granted and, in this case, refusing to accept the "historical watershed" narrative as a self-evident and neutral fact. At the same time, critical analyses seldom make their way out of academic circles, and it is an established fact that the incidents of 9/11 are widely regarded, at least in the West, as a periodizing event marking the end of the liberal euphoria of the "roaring Nineties" and ushering in a new era characterized by an acute perception of global instability, later compounded by the global economic crisis of 2008. It is important to stress, however, that recognizing the extensive use of 9/11 as a temporal marker – referring to a "pre" and "post" 9/11 as we will do in this essay – does not imply a blind acceptance of the security narrative that grew out of it.

[1] Inverted commas added by the author. U. Freitag, A. von Oppen, *Introduction: 'Translocality': An Approach to Connection and Transfer in Area Studies*, in U. Freitag, A. von Oppen (Eds.), *Translocality. The Study of Globalizing Processes from a Southern Perspective*, Brill, 2010, 1-24.

[2] A succinct and updated literature review on the topic is provided by L. Jarvis, *Time, memory, and critical terrorism studies: 9/11 twenty years on*, in *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, No. 4, 2021.

It is hard to erase the supposed significance of an event once it has become part and parcel of a widespread historical narrative. In fact, there is no such thing as an "objective" chronology and there are legitimate reasons to recognize multiple periodisations even regarding the same time span – for instance, when we consider different scales.

However, William Green warns that «all periodisations should be rooted in 'disciplined concepts of continuity and change'»[3]. This observation shift the focus from a binary question – "can 9/11 be considered a periodizing event or not?" – to the broader debate around continuity and change across major historical events. Concerning 9/11, for instance, Lee Jarvis has shown how the mainstream political rhetoric that followed the attacks was not only one of historical rupture, but of linearity and timelessness as well[4].

Studying a certain event with a historical approach means situating it within a layered structure where continuities, breaks and newly generated dynamics overlap and intermingle. In order to stick to the "discipline" called for by William Green, it seems sound to leave the field of abstraction and focus on empirical cases that allow us to assess the dynamics of change and continuity within specific contexts and temporal timeframes.

This article contributes to the literature analysing 9/11 in a historical perspective, focusing on the strategies of reaction and adaptation to the GWOT by two governments that found themselves on the frontlines of global counterterrorism, those of Algeria and Sudan[5]. We take as a timeframe the two decades straddling the attacks in New York and Washington, from 1989 to 2011.

Apart from its significance as the year marking the end of the Cold War, 1989 is meaningful for our two case studies since it saw the founding of the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) party in Algeria and the coming to power of Omar al-Bashir and his Islamist allies in Sudan. As for 2011, it seems a legitimate time marker for several reasons. The capture and killing of Osama bin Laden in May was a major turnaround for the GWOT. During those same first months of 2011, moreover, the outbreak of mass uprisings in several Arab countries led to profound political transformations across North Africa and beyond. Lastly, July 2011 saw the partition of Sudan into two state entities, opening a new era of instability for the al-Bashir regime.

In the 2001-2011 decade, the GWOT was undeniably among the most – if not "the" most – influential processes shaping political dynamics across the North Africa - Red Sea region. From 2011 onwards, contentious domestic politics regained prominence, while the U.S., under the influence of Obama's "pivot to Asia" policy, disengaged from its grand strategy of democratic change in the Arab world and started focusing on a more limited counterterrorism effort. Obama also abandoned the rhetoric of the GWOT and reverted to less emotionally charged expressions such as "countering violent extremism", while proposing a «new beginning between the U.S. and Muslims around the world» during a famous speech in Cairo[6].

[3] Inverted commas added by the author. W. A. Green, *Periodizing World History*, in *History and Theory*, No. 3, 1995, 99.

[4] L. Jarvis, *Times of Terror: Writing temporality into the war on terror*, in *Critical Terrorism Studies*, No. 2, 2008.

[5] Among the many interesting contributions in this regard we may quote R. Abrahamsen, *Return of the generals? Global militarism in Africa from the Cold War to the present*, in *Security Dialogue*, No. 1-2, 2018; A. Brigaglia, A. Iocchi, *Entangled Incidents: Nigeria in the Global War on Terror (1994-2009)*, in *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, No. 2, 2012; J. Fisher, *'Some More Reliable Than Others': Image Management, Donor Perceptions and the Global War on Terror in East African Diplomacy*, in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, No. 1, 2013; J. Keenan, *The Dark Sahara. America's War on Terror in Africa*, Pluto Press, 2009; B. E. Whitaker, *Compliance Among Weak States: Africa and the Counter-Terrorism Regime*, in *Review of International Studies*, No. 36, 2010.

[6] A. Kundnani, B. Hayes, *The Globalization of Countering Violent Extremism Policies. Undermining Human Rights, Instrumentalizing Civil Society*, Transnational Institute, 2018, https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-globalisation-of-countering-vio-

Given the timeframe considered, Sudan and Algeria offer two interesting cases for comparison. They have a long history of dealing with political Islam and jihadism, and both have tried to break out of international isolation by contributing to the U.S.-led global counterterrorism effort after 9/11. We will show, however, how a realignment of Algeria and Sudan with Western governments had already begun before 2001. On the other hand, this article contends that the warming in relations allowed for by the GWOT did not turn into a strategic partnership, mostly due to long-term path dependence in foreign policy and domestic constraints on both parts.

Our ultimate aim is to disentangle the dynamics of change triggered by 9/11 from the continuities against whose backdrop they unfolded. The conclusions pertain to the specific case studies considered, but we hope to offer a meaningful contribution to the wider debate about continuity and change after 9/11 and to the literature on the local and regional reception of the GWOT.

2. A WAR, BUT OF WHAT KIND?

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, policymakers in the U.S. called for a swift retaliation against al-Qa'ida and its supporters. There was no time for debating alternative responses: the exceptional circumstances required a swift and forceful reaction[7].

«Our war on terror begins with al-Qa'ida, but it does not end there», President George W. Bush declared before a dramatic joint session of Congress on September 20th, adding: «it will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated»[8]. His war declaration was not only targeted at transnational terrorist movements. «Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make», the president said: «either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists»[9].

To most scholars, this speech marks the inception of the GWOT. The use of such label has always been contentious, since no military or law enforcement operation has been formally named as such[10]. Nonetheless, the expression quickly gained currency since late 2001. To date, the website of the George W. Bush Presidential Library includes a whole page under the header "Global War on Terror", defined as «an international, American-led military campaign launched following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks»[11].

The main attribute of the GWOT was its amorphous nature. The campaign's territorial scope was defined according to the threats perceived by the U.S. government and its willingness to act pre-emptively to thwart them. «America is no longer protected by vast oceans», declared Bush in his January 2002 State of the Union address, «we are protected from attack only by vigorous action abroad and increased vigilance at home»[12]. No temporal framework was set either, though Bush warned that it was going to

lent-extremism-policies; Office of the Press Secretary, *Remarks by the President at Cairo University 6-04-09*, 4 June 2009, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-Cairo-university-6-04-09.

[7] R. Jackson, *Writing the war on terrorism. Language, politics and counter-terrorism*, Manchester University Press, 2005.

[8] G. W. Bush, *Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress, September 20*, in *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001-2008*, The White House, 2001, 65-73.

[9] *Ibidem*.

[10] The official denomination of the military operation launched in reaction to 9/11 is "Operation Enduring Freedom".

[11] See https://www.georgewbushlibrary.gov/research/topic-guides/global-war-terror#.

[12] Office of the Press Secretary, *President Delivers State of the Union Address*, 29 January 2002, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html.

be «a long struggle»[13]. According to many observers, it has eventually morphed into a "forever war"[14]. To further add vagueness to an already open-ended strategy, the concept of terrorism itself was – and still is – not clearly defined by international law[15]. Many criticized the choice of responding to a terrorist attack with a war campaign, noting that the GWOT did not meet the legal definition of war and that it risked elevating al-Qa'ida militants to the status of belligerents[16]. Others questioned the choice of waging a war not only against terrorists, but against "terror", an abstract concept which did not identify a clear target or an enemy[17].

The GWOT was conceived as "global" because of its potentially unlimited scope, and it was enacted through a wide – and ever-growing – range of measures, from military interventions and intelligence operations to the promotion of anti-terrorism laws, diplomatic initiatives, financial regulations and even development projects aimed at winning the "hearts and minds" of communities at risk of radicalization.

Despite Bush's "with or against us" rhetoric, the polyhedric nature of the U.S.-led global counterterrorism effort made it hard to define what "joining" the GWOT meant, and the extent of involvement required to be considered a reliable partner by Washington[18]. Eventually, the reduction of international politics to a binary logic proved to be an illusion, opening up spaces for adaptation and selective appropriation.

3. ALGERIA AND SUDAN: TWO PARALLELS CONVERGING

Several elements make Algeria and Sudan good candidates for a comparative study[19]. Both countries have a huge territory – until 2011, they were the two largest African countries – and a very low population density[20], which implies similar challenges in terms of State capacity[21]. Their economy relies mainly on revenues from hydrocarbon exports, making them typical examples of rentier State. Centre-periphery relations have been problematic in both cases, overlapping as they do with issues of identity, resources and political representation. Ethnically, the majority of Algerian and Sudanese identify themselves as Arabs, but live side-by-side with sizeable non-Arab minorities with a history of marginalization and unrest.

[13] G. W. Bush, *Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress*, cit.; B. Buzan, *Will the 'Global War on Terrorism' be the new Cold War?*, in *International Affairs*, No. 6, 2006.

[14] R. Biegon, T. F. A. Watts, *Beyond the neoconservative legacy in American counterterrorism policy: from George W. Bush to forever war*, in *International Politics*, 2024; M. Danner, *Spiral. Trapped in the Forever War*, Simon & Schuster, 2017.

[15] S. I. Horowitz, *An Undefined Global Threat: A Brief History and the Human Rights Implications of the Lack of a Universal Definition of Terrorism*, in *Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law*, No. 3, 2024.

[16] M. E. O'Connell, *When Is a War not a War? The Myth of a Global War on Terror*, in *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law*, No. 2, 2006. The article reports that in the summer of 2005 Pentagon officials started using the phrase "Global struggle against violent extremism" instead of "Global war on terror/terrorism" to avoid recognizing terrorists as counterpart in a conflict, but Bush objected the change reaffirming that the country was at war (at page 5). See also M. Howard, *What's in a Name? How to Fight Terrorism*, in *Foreign Affairs*, No. 1, 2002; C. B. Strozier, *The Global War on Terror, Sliced Four Ways*, in *World Policy Journal*, No. 4, 2008.

[17] A. J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy*, Harvard University Press, 2002; M. J. Boyle, *The War on Terror in American Grand Strategy*, in *International Affairs*, No. 2, 2008.

[18] J. Fisher, *'Some more reliable than others'*, cit.

[19] For a general introduction to the history of these two countries, we suggest J. Ruedy, *Modern Algeria. The Origins and Development of a Nation*, Indiana University Press, 2005; P. M. Holt, M.W. Daly, *History of the Sudan. From the Coming of Islam to the Present Day*, Routledge, 2011.

[20] It is estimated that in 2001 Algeria and Sudan had a population of respectively 31 and 27 million people. Data taken from the World Bank Open Data portal at https://data.worldbank.org.

[21] C. Clapham, J. Herbst, G. Mills (Eds.), *Big African States. Angola, Sudan, DRC, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa*, Wits University Press, 2001.

Despite having experienced opposite decolonization paths – Algeria obtained independence through a violent struggle, while Sudan was declared a sovereign State peacefully by the British and the Egyptians – at the end of the 1980s they shared a certain number of political features: the persistence of military rule; the decline of traditional independentist parties; the increasing popularity of Islamist movements[22].

The latter had been on the rise all over the Muslim world for several decades, profiting from the decline of anticolonial secular nationalism[23]. Starting in the 1970s, they had mobilized growing constituencies around a political platform centred on the introduction of *shari'a*. Moreover, Islamic charities were engaged in assisting the poorest strata of society, compensating for the shrinkage of public services due to structural adjustment policies.

In the late 1980s, it became clear that military establishments and Islamist movements were poised to become the two main political actors in many Muslim-majority countries. The nature of their relationship, however, would vary according to each case, and in this regard Sudan and Algeria represent the two opposite ends of the spectrum.

In Sudan, the National Islamic Front (NIF) led by Hasan al-Turabi – originally an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood – became the third largest party in Parliament after the 1986 elections[24]. It was a good result, but not enough to aspire to govern the country. Al-Turabi, in June 1989, persuaded field marshal Omar Hasan al-Bashir to stage a military coup. He would later justify himself with the following words: «We had a base, and every time we approached government, somebody did not like Islam to come to power, even through democracy. If democracy is going to bring Islam, then abort it! We have seen this in Algeria, in Turkey, in Palestine»[25]. Al-Bashir's military junta initially presented itself as nationalist and non-ideological, but NIF cadres gradually occupied key positions within the government and the State. Over the following years, Sudan would become the laboratory of a unique military-Islamist alliance, the so-called *Inqadh* ("salvation") regime. Going through various phases and transformations, the *Inqadh* would rule Sudan until 2019, keeping the military-Islamist axis at its core[26].

As referred to by al-Turabi, the Algerian Islamists faced a very different situation. The FIS gained 54% of the total ballots in the June 1990 local elections and obtained a similar result in the December 1991 national legislative consultations, unseating the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) from its longstanding dominant position[27]. The military-dominated ruling elite, or *le pouvoir* ("the power") as the Algerians call it[28], decided to cancel the electoral process and ban the FIS. Part of the Islamist camp decided to take up arms and start a guerrilla. On the other side, the hardline faction within the *pouvoir* – the so-called *éradicateurs*, i.e. those determined to unroot the Islamists – prevailed over the moderates. The result was an all-out military

[22] These conditions were not, by the way, exclusive to the two countries considered here. Egypt and Turkey, for instance, had a similar regime configuration. S. A. Cook, *Ruling But Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey*, John Hopkins University Press, 2007.

[23] There is a huge literature on the emergence of Islamist movements. A good overall reference is S. Akbarzadeh (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam*, Routledge, 2023 and also Q. Wiktorowicz (Ed.), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, Indiana University Press, 2004.

[24] M. Campanini, K. Mezran (a cura di), *I Fratelli Musulmani nel mondo contemporaneo*, UTET, 2010.

[25] Author's interview with Hasan Abdallah al-Turabi, Khartoum, 15 April 2008.

[26] A. A. Gallab, *The First Islamist Republic: Development and Disintegration of Islamism in the Sudan*, Ashgate, 2008; A.A. Gallab, *Their Second Republic: Islamism in Sudan From Disintegration to Oblivion*, Ashgate, 2014; G. Musso, *La caserma e la moschea. Militari e islamisti al potere in Sudan*, Carocci, 2016 and N. Salomon, *For Love of the Prophet: An Ethnography of Sudan's Islamic State*, Princeton University Press, 2017.

[27] S. Labat, *Les islamistes algériens. Entre les urnes et le maquis*, Éditions du Seuil, 1995.

[28] The closest English term to what the Algerian mean for *le pouvoir* is probably "deep State", as analyzed in J. P. Filiu, *From deep State to Islamic State. The Arab counter-revolution and its jihadi legacy*, C. Hurst & Co., 2015.

confrontation that would go down in history as Algeria's "black decade": a ruthless conflict that caused 150.000 victims and a degree of social disruption unseen since the war of independence[29].

It should be noted, *inter alia*, that the Sudanese NIF had close contacts with the FIS. In 1992, Algeria severed diplomatic ties with Sudan and Iran, accusing them of supporting terrorism[30].

During the 1990s, Algeria and Sudan had a turbulent relationship with Western countries, though for opposite reasons. The 1992 army takeover in Algiers had been met in Europe with public statements calling for the restoration of democracy, albeit without a clear rejection of the military government[31]. Washington had opted for a more vociferous stance, keeping the strongmen in Algiers at arm's length and calling for dialogue to end the conflict[32]. Over the subsequent years, human rights organizations kept on denouncing the army's violent counter-insurgency strategy, leading the U.S. and European governments to declare an arms embargo against Algeria. On the other hand, Algiers was allowed to negotiate with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) a structural adjustment programme that saved the country from default, in exchange for the implementation of neoliberal economic reforms[33]. While the widespread violence of the civil war led to the diplomatic isolation of the Algerian government, Western decision-makers feared an Islamist victory and did not allow the regime to collapse.

In the case of Sudan, international ostracization grew in the first half of the 1990s due to the hazardous foreign policy of the *Inqadh*. The Sudanese government sided with Saddam Hussein during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis and, almost at the same time, it sealed a military partnership with Iran. The convening of the Popular Arab and Islamic Conference (PAIC) in Khartoum, gathering several Islamist and anti-imperialist movements, aroused fears that Sudan could become a hotbed of extremism and terrorism[34]. Suspects turned into open hostility against the regime after a failed assassination attempt against Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June 1995 was attributed to the Sudanese intelligence[35]. The United Nations (UN) sanctioned Sudan and the U.S. followed suit, adding bilateral economic sanctions to the measures already in place since 1993, when Khartoum had been put on the State Department's list of states sponsors of terrorism[36]. During the 1990s, Washington drifted more and more towards a regime change agenda, giving support to the rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and building a regional alliance against Khartoum[37].

Given the fact that Algeria and Sudan had been two important focal points in the ascent of political Islam and jihadism during the 1990s, they quickly understood that the GWOT implied the threat of

[29] For an in-depth analysis of the Algerian civil war see L. Martinez, *La guerre civile en Algérie*, Khartala, 1998. Other interesting perspectives are exposed in F. Volpi, *Islam and Democracy. The Failure of Dialogue in Algeria*, Pluto Press, 2003 and H. Roberts, *The Battlefield Algeria 1988-2002: Studies in a Broken Polity*, Verso, 2017.

[30] J. P. Filiu, *From deep State to Islamic State*, cit., 98.

[31] Le Monde, *La crise Algérienne. M. Mitterrand: « Les dirigeants s'honoreront en retrouvant le fil de la démocratisation »*, in *Le Monde*, 16 January 1992, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1992/01/16/la-crise-algerienne-m-mitterrand-les-dirigeants-s-honoreront-en-retrouvant-le-fil-de-la-democratisation_3882058_1819218.html.

[32] Le Monde, *La crise algérienne. Nuances américaines et menace iranienne*, in *Le Monde*, 16 January 1992, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1992/01/16/la-crise-algerienne-nuances-americaines-et-menace-iranienne_3882064_1819218.html; B. Dillman, *«Round up the Unusual Suspects»: U.S. Policy Toward Algeria and its Islamists*, in *Middle East Policy*, No. 3, 2001.

[33] F. Volpi, *Islam and Democracy*, cit., 110-126.

[34] R. Marshal, O. Ousman, *Les ambitions internationales du Soudan Islamiste*, in *Politique Africaine,* No. 66, 1997.

[35] T. Dagne, *Africa and the War on Terrorism*, CRS Report for Congress, 17 January 2002, 6-7, https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metacrs2378/. As later reported, allegations of Sudanese involvement in the attack were likely overestimated.

[36] Y. Ronen, *Sudan and the United States. Is a Decade of Tension Winding Down?*, in *Middle East Policy*, No. 1, 2002.

[37] D. Connell, F. Smyth, *Africa's New Block*, in *Foreign Affairs*, No. 2, 1998.

American intervention but it also offered an opportunity for gaining readmission to the Western-led international community[38]. Algeria, with its deep knowledge of the jihadist ideology and modus operandi, and its longstanding experience at countering them, could aspire to become a regional ally for Washington. Sudan had already begun in 1999-2000 to distance itself from the more radical Islamist fringes but was still regarded as a rogue State by most Western and regional powers. With the advent of the GWOT, it could make available its inside knowledge of transnational jihadist networks to prove its good faith in working for the sake of international and regional security. Cooperating with the U.S. and their allies, however, could undermine domestic legitimacy, and therefore it required a careful balancing act.

4. «WE TOLD YOU SO»: ALGERIA IN THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

Unsurprisingly, the government in Algiers was one of the first to condemn the attacks carried out by al-Qa'ida against the U.S.. After having spent years trying to persuade foreign diplomats about the global nature of the jihadist threat, the North African country felt vindicated in its claims and presented itself as a pioneer in the fight against terrorism[39]. In the aftermath of 9/11, the Algerian authorities reportedly delivered to the U.S. hundreds of files about suspected Islamist militants. Bilateral visits at the political and security level grew in frequency[40]. This was not, however, an entirely new development. Washington and Algiers had already intensified their intelligence cooperation before 9/11, particularly after the arrest of a young Algerian citizen, Ahmed Ressam, caught while driving a car full of explosives destined to be detonated during the millennium celebrations in Seattle[41].

More broadly, Western attitude towards Algeria had started to change since the election of president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 1999, thanks to his efforts to implement a policy of national reconciliation to end the civil war. In June 2000, Bouteflika became the first Algerian president to make an official visit to Paris in 17 years[42]. In July 2001, he was received by George W. Bush at the White House, again, the first Algerian president to be given this honour since 1985[43]. Less than two months after 9/11, he was invited for a second time to the White House to discuss about counterterrorism with the U.S. administration.

American aid to the North African country began to grow exponentially[44]. In July 2001, the U.S. Department of State had presented the Congress with a budget request for Algeria of only 200.000 dollars on a single budget chapter (IMET – International Military Education and Training). 10 years after, the same request would grow up to slightly less than 3 million dollars – a fifteen-times increase – including funds under the IMET as well as the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) and Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR) umbrella.

[38] Cédric Jourde, using Mauritania as a case study, has shown how the GWOT led the regime in Nouakchott to enact a series of performative acts to be seen as a reliable ally by the U.S.. C. Jourde, *Constructing Representations of the 'Global War on Terror' in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania*, in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, No. 1, 2007.

[39] A. Arieff, *U.S.-Algerian Security Cooperation and Regional Counterterrorism*, IFRI, 2011, 8-10, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/alexisarieff.pdf; J. Keenan, *The Dark Sahara*, cit., 164.

[40] Y. Zoubir, K. Benabdallah-Gambier, *The United States and the North African Imbroglio: Balancing Interests in Algeria, Morocco and the Western Sahara*, in *Mediterranean Politics*, No. 2, 191.

[41] B. Dillman, *«Round up the Unusual Suspects»*, cit., 135-139.

[42] J. Garçon, *Paris consacre Bouteflika*, in *Libération*, 15 June 2000, https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2000/06/15/paris-consacre-bouteflika_330035/.

[43] B. Dillman, *«Round up the Unusual Suspects»*, cit., 132.

[44] H. Hamouchene, B. Rouabah, *The political economy of regime survival: Algeria in the context of the African and Arab uprisings*, in *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 150, 2016.

Such figures attest to the warming of the relations between Algiers and Washington. Nonetheless, a total annual aid of 3 million dollars could not be regarded, in absolute terms, as a sizeable contribution for a country like Algeria[45]. For instance, Tunisia, about 15 times smaller and with a quarter of the population, received more than 6 million dollars from the U.S.. The comparison is even more striking when looking at the two longstanding American partners in North Africa, Morocco and Egypt, that could count on 43.6 million and 1.5 billion dollars of annual aid respectively[46].

Bouteflika also hoped that Washington's positive attitude could translate into an increase of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from private American stakeholders, to boost Algeria's economic recovery. A Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) was signed during Bouteflika's first visit to Washington in July 2001, but it never evolved into a full-fledged free trade agreement similar to the one that the U.S. would sign with Morocco in 2004[47]. Moreover, American investments in the country were mainly directed at the hydrocarbon sector and, as such, they almost had no impact in terms of employment and structural growth[48].

On the security side, the Bush administration authorised arms sales to Algeria[49], ending the embargo of the 1990s, but the U.S. remained hesitant to sell Algeria heavy weaponry and night visors, despite insistence from Bouteflika himself[50]. At the same time, Yahya Zoubir contends that Algeria was not interested in large purchases of armaments from the U.S. other than some specific and sophisticated equipment, having traditionally relied on Soviet/Russian weaponry and fearing of becoming dependent from Washington[51]. A cautious attitude prevailed on both sides.

The GWOT was also politically dangerous for the Algerian establishment, since it became imbued with elements of democracy promotion following the American invasion of Iraq. In November 2003, George W. Bush held a famous speech before the National Endowment for Democracy, articulating what would be known as the "freedom agenda": «instead of dwelling on past wrongs and blaming others», he said, «governments in the Middle East need to confront real problems, and serve the true interests of their nations. The good and capable people of the Middle East all deserve responsible leadership. For too long, many people in that region have been victims and subjects – they deserve to be active citizens»[52]. However, when Secretary of State Colin Powell visited the three Maghreb countries less than one month later, his public statements on the need for democratic reforms were very vague[53]. More than his mild recommendations on democracy and human rights, what was annoying for the Alge-

[45] Y. Zoubir, *Algeria and U.S. Interests: Containing Radical Islam and Promoting Democracy*, in *Middle East Policy*, No. 1, 2002.

[46] The figures provided have been taken from the online archive of the U.S. State Department, https://www.state.gov-/u-s-department-of-state-archive-websites/.

[47] F. Beaugé, *Algérie: une ambition de puissance régionale*, in *Le Monde*, 9 July 2007, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2007/07/09/algerie-une-ambition-de-puissance-regionale_933353_3212.html; Y. Zoubir, K. Benabdallah-Gambier, *The United States and the North African Imbroglio*, cit., 182.

[48] B. Dillman, *«Round up the Unusual Suspects»*, cit., 131-135.

[49] Le Monde, *Les Etats-Unis livreront du matériel militaire à Alger*, in *Le Monde*, 12 Décembre 2002, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2002/12/12/les-etats-unis-livreront-du-materiel-militaire-a-alger_301826_1819218.html.

[50] M. Berkouk, *U.S.–Algerian Security Cooperation and the War on Terror*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 17 June 2009, https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2009/06/us-algerian-security-cooperation-and-the-war-on-terror?lang=en.

[51] Y. Zoubir, *The United States and Algeria*, cit., 15.

[52] Office of the Press Secretary, *President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East*, 6 November 2003, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html.

[53] C. Marquis, *On North Africa Trip, Powell Is Soft On Allies With Rights Blemishes*, in *The New York Times*, 4 December 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/04/world/on-north-africa-trip-powell-is-soft-on-allies-with-rights-blemishes.html.

rian ruling class was the fact that, during his subsequent stop-over in Morocco, he promised a fourfold increase in bilateral aid to the Kingdom.

Given the transnational nature of the terrorist threat, the U.S. was encouraging the formation of regional coalitions within the framework of the GWOT. Algeria tried to exploit the situation to its advantage by presenting itself as a role-model for counterterrorism in the Maghreb/Sahel area. Together with Egypt, for instance, Algeria had been one of the first Arab countries to introduce anti-terrorism legislation, something that most North African countries would do after 2001[54]. Algeria had leveraged its know-how in counterterrorism to increase its political standing at the continental level, by placing itself at the forefront of the African Union (AU) counterterrorism strategy even before 9/11. The AU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism was drafted during a summit held in Algiers in 1999. One year after 9/11, the same city hosted another continental conference on the matter, which resulted in the adoption of the Plan of Action of the African Union High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting on Terrorism[55]. The latter mandated the creation of the African Center for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), established in the Algerian capital in 2004[56]. On a broader level, Algeria was also among the founding members of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) launched in 2011 in New York[57].

Despite these remarkable diplomatic achievements, that amounted to an implicit rehabilitation of Algeria's image after the abuses of the "black decade", Algeria's operational involvement in the GWOT raised several sensitive issues. First, the War on Terror served to legitimize U.S. military and intelligence operations abroad. Quite the contrary, Algeria wanted to avoid the deployment of foreign troops on its territory or the creation of permanent bases such as the headquarter of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM)[58]. Even a lower-profile initiative like the opening of a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) office in Algiers was abandoned due to public outrage after the news became public[59].

Algeria joined the less intrusive U.S.-led Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Mediterranean Dialogue. In 2010, to prove its leadership and independence, it proposed the establishment of a joint military command for the Sahel states (*Comité d'État-Major Opérationnel Conjoint* (CEMOC)) inviting Mali, Niger, and Mauritania to join[60]. The project, however, remained mostly on paper since Algeria's neighbors were reluctant to recognize a leading role to the country they deemed responsible for exporting terrorism in the region. Algeria's leadership ambitions were also hindered by a domestic red line, i.e. the constitutional clause prohibiting its armed forces to be deployed abroad[61].

[54] F. Tamburini, *The Counter Terrorism Law System in Algeria: To Serve and Protect or to Control and Oppress?*, in T. Workneh, P. Haridakis (Eds.), *Counter-Terrorism Laws and Freedom of Expression Global Perspectives*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2021, 313-332.

[55] I. Touazi, *The African Union's Counter-Terrorism Strategies: Between Globalized Jihadism and Regionalized Responses*, in *ITSS Verona Magazine*, No. 1, 2022.

[56] Information on the Center's activities can be found on its institutional website https://www.caert.org.dz.

[57] L. Dris-Aït Hamadouche, *L'Algérie et la sécurité au Sahel: lecture critique d'une approche paradoxale*, in *Confluences Méditerranée*, No. 90, 2014, 113.

[58] Y. Zoubir, *The United States and Algeria*, cit., 18. No African country gave its availability to host AFRICOM, which was created in 2007 and has been headquartered since then within the US military base in Stuttgart, Germany.

[59] H. Mattes, *Domestic Security in the Maghreb: Deficits and Counter-Measures*, in *GIGA Working Papers*, No. 186, 2012, 14.

[60] R. O. Olaniyi, *Algeria: The Struggle against al-Qaeda in the Maghreb*, in U. A. Tar (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Africa*, Routledge, 2021, 318-327.

[61] L. A. Ammour, *Regional Security Cooperation in the Maghreb and Sahel: Algeria's Pivotal Ambivalence*, in *Africa Security Brief*, No. 18, 2012; L. A. Ammour, *Algeria, the Sahel, and the Current Mali Crisis*, in *Notes internacionals CIDOB*, No. 67, 2013.

Meanwhile, terrorist attacks in the country continued unabated, reaching the stunning number of 938 incidents recorded between 2001 and 2012[62]. Some have argued that Algeria manipulated the jihadist threat in the Sahel to benefit from the aid flowing from Washington[63]. Such a thesis, however persuasive it may seem, is hard to prove with conclusive evidence. If Algeria – and specifically its feared *Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité* (DRS)[64] – has concocted the terrorist threat in the Sahara/Sahel, it is doubtful that it has reaped enough fruits from its strategy, and it has certainly proven unable to keep the genie inside the bottle. The pillaging of Libya's arsenals since 2011 and the explosion of the crisis in northern Mali in 2012, with the convergence of jihadism and Tuareg separatism, increased the number of variables Algiers cannot control. In 2013, the terrorist attack against a gas facility in the town of In Amenas, with the killing of 38 expatriates during the rescue operation managed by the Algerian special forces, shocked the country – oil and gas installations had been spared by violence even during the civil war – and threatened to destabilize the lifeline of the Algerian economy[65].

5. SUDAN: STUCK AT THE CROSSROAD OF REDEMPTION

When the GWOT began, the global hunt against jihadists had already been going on for at least one decade. Africa had been an important theatre of this confrontation and Sudan, since 1989, had become a meeting point for Islamist militants, who could enter the country without a visa, open offices and training camps. From 1991 to 1996, Osama Bin Laden had lived in Khartoum, conducting his entrepreneurial activities and quietly stepping up his support for the jihadist cause. His network was deemed responsible for the August 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es-Salam, to which the American government responded with the destruction of a factory in Khartoum allegedly producing chemical weapons, an accusation that was later to prove false[66].

Given its history, Sudan might have seemed like an easy target for the GWOT. Instead, since the beginning it was spared the inclusion in the "axis of evil" that President Bush identified as the source of global instability[67]. Khartoum's cooperation in counterterrorism became so valuable as to persuade the Department of State to describe Sudan, in its official Country Report on Terrorism of 2006, as «a strong partner in the War on Terror»[68], disregarding the blatant contradiction of designating as such a country that it still classified as a "state sponsors of terrorism".

It would be easy to think that Sudan's leap from pariah state to trusted U.S. partner was made possible by the post-9/11 international context and Khartoum's compliance with the imperatives of the GWOT, but the picture is more complex.

To understand the evolution of the Sudan-U.S. relations straddling the Twin Towers attacks, one

[62] R. O. Olaniyi, *Algeria*, cit., 320.
[63] A. Arieff, *U.S.-Algerian Security Cooperation*, cit., 11; J. Keenan, *The Dark Sahara*, cit.
[64] The DRS was created in 1990 by incorporating various pre-existing intelligence agencies. From its founding until its dissolution in 2015, it was led by the feared Mohamed "Toufik" Mediène.
[65] A. Hallqvist, B. Hammargren, *Navigating in a Complex Neighbourhood. Algeria's Responses to Security Challenges in Libya and the Sahel*, in *Report FOI-R--4960—SE*, 2020, https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--4960--SE, 32; D. Lounnas, *La stratégie Algérienne face à AQMI*, in *Politique Etrangère*, No. 3, 2013.
[66] E. Croddy, *Dealing with al-Shifa: Intelligence and Counterproliferation*, in *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, No. 1, 2002.
[67] Office of the Press Secretary, *President Delivers State of the Union Address*, cit.
[68] U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2006*, 30 April 2007, https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2006/82736.html.

must consider that, already towards the end of the second Clinton Administration (1997-2001), the U.S. government's stance on Sudan had converted from a policy of regime change to one of cautious constructive engagement, following two parallel tracks: anti-terrorism and peace-making[69].

Washington's policy of constructive engagement with Khartoum must also be seen in light of the internal dynamics of the Sudanese regime. Between 1999 and 2000, a bitter struggle had opposed Omar al-Bashir and Hasan al-Turabi, eventually leading to the latter's arrest[70]. The ousting of the Islamist ideologue allowed Khartoum to rebuild trust with regional conservative powers like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The regime had also been strengthened by the starting of oil exports, which had infused the state's coffers with unprecedented wealth. In view of these developments, we might contend that Washington, since 2000, quietly favoured the normalization of the regime upon the premise that «stability is the most effective enemy of terror»[71].

The same as we have seen with Algeria, Washington had already sought Khartoum's cooperation on counterterrorism before 9/11, opening a channel of communication between the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Sudanese *mukhabarat* since 2000[72]. In the same period, Sudan had signed all the main international conventions against terrorism and, in May 2001, it had adopted an anti-terrorism law[73].

The attacks against the Twin Towers, hence, were not the prime triggers for renewed U.S.-Sudan cooperation. However, they led to its intensification and accelerated a *détente* between the two countries: a few days after 9/11, the U.S. allowed for the lifting of UN sanctions against Sudan and in May 2002 it reopened its embassy in Khartoum[74]. For its part, Sudan provided the U.S. with information on Islamist networks, reportedly infiltrated terrorist organizations on behalf of the CIA in places like Somalia, and detained foreign fighters willing to join the anti-American guerrilla in Iraq[75].

At the regional level, Khartoum hosted the 2002 summit of the Inter-Governmental Agency of Development (IGAD) – gathering the countries of the Horn of Africa – and centred the agenda on terrorism[76]. The discussions resulted in the adoption of a Draft Implementation Plan to Counter Terrorism and in the creation of the IGAD Capacity Building Programme Against Terrorism (ICPAT)[77].

Meanwhile, the U.S. was building its regional security architecture, creating the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), consisting of a rather modest contingent of 1,800 soldiers

[69] Human Rights Watch, *Sudan, Oil and Human Rights*, 2003, 478-498, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/sudan1103/sudanprint.pdf.

[70] S. Bellucci, *Islam and Democracy: the 1999 Palace Coup in Sudan*, in *Middle East Policy*, No. 3, 2000.

[71] R. I. Rotberg, *The Horn of Africa and Yemen: Diminishing the Threat of Terrorism*, in R. I. Rotberg (Ed.), *Battling Terrorism in the Horn of Africa*, Brookings Institution Press, World Peace Foundation, 2005, 1-22.

[72] The word *mukhabarat* in Arabic means "information services" and it is used to indicate the intelligence and security apparatuses. K. Silverstein, *Official Pariah Sudan Valuable to America's War on Terrorism*, in *Los Angeles Times*, 29 April 2005, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-apr-29-fg-sudan29-story.html.

[73] Republic of Sudan, *Qanun Mukafaha al-Irhab (Anti Terrorism Act)*, 19 May 2001, https://cyrilla.org/en/entity/2ozqmfk7nk556iqoj851bjfw29. For a brief analysis of the law, see: The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, *Sudan. Target One to Silence a Hundred: The Repression of Human Rights Lawyers in Sudan*, 2018, 12, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/sudan_joint_report_web_version.pdf.

[74] United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1372 (2001)*, S/RES/1372 (2001), 28 September 2001, https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1372(2001).

[75] S. Goldenberg, *Sudan becomes US ally in 'war on terror'*, in *The Guardian*, 30 April 2005, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/30/sudan.usa.

[76] T. Carney, *The Sudan: Political Islam and Terrorism*, in R.I. Rotberg (Ed.), *Battling Terrorism in the Horn of Africa*, cit., 119-140.

[77] The two IGAD initiatives were launched respectively in 2003 and 2004. See Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, IGAD Security Sector Program, *Fighting Terrorism Through Justice: Implementing the IGAD Framework for Legal Cooperation Against Terrorism*, 2012, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/TaskForce_Report_May20121-1.pdf.

based in Djibouti, and launching the East Africa Counterterrorism Initiative (EACTI), meant to increase counterterrorism capabilities in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda[78]. Sudan was notably absent, but it was later included in the renewed and enlarged East African Regional Strategic Initiative (EARSI), launched in 2009[79].

All of this does not mean that the U.S. had completely dropped its mistrust towards Sudan. Bilateral sanctions remained in place and Sudan was still included in the list of states sponsors of terrorism. Similar to what Algeria had experienced with Morocco, other countries – Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia in particular – had a longer-standing relationship with the U.S. and were considered more reliable as partners in the GWOT[80].

The main source of instability in Sudan remained the civil war between the government and the SPLM/A[81]. A peace process sponsored by IGAD had been going on since 1993, without any meaningful breakthrough except for the signing of a Declaration of Principles in 1994. There is a fairly widespread narrative supporting the idea that 9/11 was the decisive factor in reviving the peace talks, due to the pressure it put on the Sudanese leadership to be condescending towards Washington[82]. This causal nexus must be investigated thoroughly, especially if one considers that the peace agreement was signed in January 2005, more than three years after 9/11.

The Bush Administration's involvement in the peace process was supported by a heterogeneous constituency, ranging from evangelical communities and the oil lobby to liberal human rights activists and the Congress black caucus, most of whom were deeply hostile to the regime in Khartoum[83]. At the same time, the U.S. needed cooperation from Khartoum in its quest for al-Qa'ida cadres and militants and, therefore, was likely to adopt a more balanced posture towards the two parties in conflict.

A few days before 9/11, Bush named senator Jack Danforth as his special envoy for peace in Sudan. After the attacks, Danforth probably felt a stronger pressure to deliver on his mission and his leverage vis-à-vis the Sudanese government increased. However, he reportedly never dealt with issues related to terrorism during his tenure, nor he offered the lifting of Sudan from the list of states sponsors of terrorism to the regime in exchange for concessions at the negotiation table[84].

Eventually, an indirect accelerator for the Sudanese peace talks came from the Iraq war. The U.S. Administration needed to rebut the claims of those who saw the GWOT as an anti-Muslim crusade, and Sudan offered such an opportunity. The personal involvement of Secretary of State Colin Powell – and, to a lesser extent, of President Bush himself – in the peace process must be seen in the light of the need to give maximum visibility to this accomplishment.

78 P. Lyman, J. S. Morrison, *The Terrorist Threat in Africa*, in *Foreign Affairs*, No. 1, 2004.

79 L. Ploch, *Countering Terrorism in East Africa: the U.S. Response*, in *CRS Report for Congress*, 3 November 2010, https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/uscrs/2010/en/77016.

80 Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda even took part in the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq of 2003. P. Lyman, J. S. Morrison, *The Terrorist Threat in Africa*, cit., 77. Kenya was one of the top ATA (Anti-Terrorism Assistance) recipients in the world even before 9/11, and together with Djibouti and Ethiopia was identified by the Department of State as a "frontline state" in the GWOT. See L. Ploch, *Countering Terrorism in East Africa*, cit., 33.

81 The most complete and authoritative account of Sudan's multiple crises remains D. H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars and New Wars*, Boydell & Brewer, 2016.

82 Such interpretation is, for instance, argued by H. F. Johnson, *Waging Peace in Sudan: The Inside Story of the Negotiations that Ended Africa's Longest Civil War*, Sussex Academic Press, 2011, and R. Iyob, G. Khadiagala, *Sudan: The Elusive Quest for Peace*, Lynne Rienner, 2006.

83 A. Huliaras, *Evangelists, Oil Companies, and Terrorists: The Bush Administration's Policy Towards Sudan*, in *Orbis*, No. 4, 2006.

84 D. H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, cit., 177.

9/11 and the GWOT, hence, surely had a role in breaking the stalemate in the negotiations, but they cannot be considered as the main driver of the American involvement in a peace process that Washington was already supporting before 2001 and that had only marginal links with the issue of counterterrorism.

Neither was the signing of the peace agreement enough for a full normalization of the U.S.-Sudan relationship, which was shattered once again by the outbreak of a parallel civil war in Darfur, Sudan's westernmost region, in 2003[85]. The Save Darfur Coalition, launched by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and several human rights groups, was able to put this remote region at the centre of the Bush administration's foreign policy[86]. Colin Powell became the first member of a sitting American government to recognize a conflict as a "genocide", though without drawing concrete consequences from this unprecedented step[87].

The Sudanese regime, after having carefully worked to rebuild its international reputation, found itself facing the gravest of accusations at the international level, due to its ruthless counterinsurgency campaign in Darfur.

This did not prevent intelligence cooperation to go ahead discreetly: the State Department report quoted above, defining Sudan as a "strong partner" in the GWOT was published one year after Powell's Darfur genocide statement. This only highlighted how 9/11, far from Bush's simplistic «with us or with the terrorists»[88] rhetoric, had made American foreign policy prone to more contradictions and ambiguities.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The various campaigns launched by the U.S. under the umbrella of the GWOT created attractive opportunities for would-be partners but requested a careful balance between cooperation in counterterrorism and the protection of national sovereignty. Wary of such selective approach, the U.S. was happy to welcome new supporters in their fold but tended to rely on time-tested allies as strategic partners. The GWOT did not bring about a major reshuffle of alliances between the U.S. and the countries of Sahel and the Horn of Africa, but it allowed certain states that had been ostracized for their policies – like Algeria and Sudan – to continue on a path of normalization they had, however, begun before 9/11.

By historicizing Algeria and Sudan's relationships with the U.S., our analysis has led us to dispel the notion of 9/11 as an epochal watershed, at least concerning the specific context under consideration. The attacks by al-Qa'ida against New York and Washington represented the apex of at least a decade of growing anti-Western jihadi activism, faced by an equivalent development of counterterrorism activities spearheaded by the U.S..

Some of the facts quoted above, like the adoption of the AU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in 1999 or the introduction of the Anti-Terrorism Act in Sudan in May 2001,

[85] An analysis of the causes and course of the Darfur war is beyond the scope of this article. As a general reference, see S. M. Hassan, C. E. Ray, *Darfur and the Crisis of Governance in Sudan. A Critical Reader*, Cornell University Press, 2009.

[86] M. Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors. Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror,* Verso, 2009.

[87] R. Hamilton, *Inside Colin Powell's Decision to Declare Genocide in Darfur*, in *The Atlantic*, 11 August 2011, https://aepact.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Inside-Colin-Powell.pdf.

[88] G. W. Bush, *Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress*, cit.

give an idea of how terrorism was becoming a central issue in Africa well before 9/11, mostly because governments were willing to exploit it to stiff domestic opposition.

Considering our two case studies, Algeria was eager to reap the "terrorism dividend" in terms of foreign support and obtain an ex-post legitimacy for its repressive policies against the Islamists. On the other hand, it was equally aware of the potential threats posed by the GWOT to its sovereignty and thus it refused any form of cooperation that was deemed too invasive. Such half-hearted attitude on the part of Algiers was mirrored by an equally cautious behavior by Washington, which proved willing to work with the North African country on counterterrorism without elevating it to the role of strategic regional partner, a status reserved for Morocco.

The Algerian case also highlights a mismatch in terms of expectations: while the North African country hoped to exploit the GWOT to improve its bilateral relations with the U.S. and bolster its regional hegemonic ambitions, the American administration saw jihadism as a transnational threat that required the forming of regional coalitions. The only way to reconcile these two approaches would have been for Algeria to be recognized as the pivotal state for the GWOT in the Maghreb-Sahel region, but it could not, for the reasons explained above.

The story of Sudan's discreet *détente* with the U.S. before 9/11 proves, as well, that counterterrorism had become an instrument for the normalization of foreign relations with Western powers even for a regime that had openly flirted with transnational jihadist networks. After the beginning of the GWOT, U.S.-led operations became more pervasive and intrusive, but the basic message did not change: a country could escape isolation or, worse, an American military intervention if it showed a collaborative attitude in tackling the terrorist threat. Such cooperation, however, had to be discreet and, most of all, kept apart from the sphere of domestic politics, because the U.S. remained a cumbersome ally for governments that had, in many cases, built their legitimacy on an anti-American or anti-Western discourse. For Muslim political leaders, moreover, it was difficult to dispel the idea that the GWOT was, in fact, a global Islamophobic crusade. To quote one of many episodes, in May 2005 anti-American protests erupted in several cities worldwide – including Khartoum – for the alleged desecration of the Quran by American soldiers in the Guantanamo prison[89].

The Darfur crisis, which prevented a full normalization of the U.S.-Sudan relations, became a litmus test of the contradictions of the GWOT. Despite being considered as a "strong partner" of the U.S. in the fight against transnational terrorism, Sudan was still ruled by the same authoritarian regime in place since 1989. For the elite at power in Khartoum, reaffirming a stiff control over Darfur took precedence over the lifting of sanctions and the normalization of relations with the West. Such unwillingness to reform itself represented a blatant rejection of the "freedom agenda" that was ostensibly embedded into the GWOT. While the U.S. government could well live with this contradiction, the American civil society was vocal in calling its representatives to account. The Save Darfur campaign tarnished the image of one of the few success stories of the Bush administration, that of having put an end to one the long and bloody Sudanese civil war.

That very advocacy campaign, however, had implicitly absorbed the binary logic of the GWOT and its military ethos (the ultimate aim of the Save Darfur coalition was getting the U.S. military to intervene

[89] NBC News, *Anti-US Rallies Erupt Over Handling of the Quran*, in *NBC News*, 27 May 2005, https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna8006012.

with "boots on the ground" in Sudan). Darfur clearly could not fit into the "Muslims vs. Christians" narrative, because it was a civil war between Muslims. It was hence portrayed as a conflict pitting the evil "Arabs" against the helpless "Africans", but its tribal dimension had more to do with the access and distribution of resources, rather than hypostatized racial identities[90]. Most of all, the insurgency in Darfur was a war waged by regional movements contesting the centralized nature of the postcolonial state. The GWOT was simply too "high" and all-encompassing to deal with these issues, and it was accompanied by a discursive template that obliterated the local complexities of political violence.

What both the U.S. government and the civil society activists seemed to miss was the fact that Darfur was one of many conflicts in the Sahel and in East Africa caused by the failure of postcolonial governance, a failure that the GWOT was likely to worsen. Most of the post-9/11 re-engagement of the U.S. with states like Algeria and Sudan was taking place through military and intelligence channels, strengthening the very "*mukhabarat* state"[91] whose repression and corruption were at the origin of the grievances exploited by terrorist networks. This short-circuit constitutes one of the fundamental contradictions of the Global War on Terror[92].

[90] M. Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors*, cit.

[91] J. P. Entelis, *The Democratic Imperative vs. the Authoritarian Impulse: The Maghrib State between Transition and Terrorism*, in *Middle East Journal*, No. 4, 2005, 544.

[92] On the tension between the normative and the realist aspects of the War on Terror see among others T. Carothers, *Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror*, in *Foreign Affairs*, No. 1, 2003 and D. H. Dunn, *Bush, 11 September and the Conflicting Strategies of the 'War on Terrorism'*, in *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 2005.